

WHAT CAUSES BABY FLATHEAD?

A baby is most at risk to develop a flathead in the first 4 months of life. During this time the baby's skull is softer and the infant is not yet strong enough to roll or change their position on their own.

If your baby prefers to look in one direction or spends most of the time on his or her back, the constant pressure acting on the infant's skull can cause it to become flat.



While baby flathead does not affect the development of the baby's brain it can affect the baby's appearance.



REMEMBER!

Babies should get a total of at least 30 minutes of supervised tummy time a day.

If you have concerns with your baby's head shape you should discuss them with your family doctor or community health nurse to learn about other help that might be available.



Developed by Eastern Health

Prepared by Physiotherapy Services,
Janeway Child Health and Rehabilitation Centre

2013



Prevent Baby Flathead

Tips for Caregivers to Prevent Skull Flattening in Young Babies



Developed by Eastern Health

WHAT IS BABY FLATHEAD?

Baby flathead happens when a baby's skull becomes flat due to forces acting on the skull.

There are two main types of baby flathead:

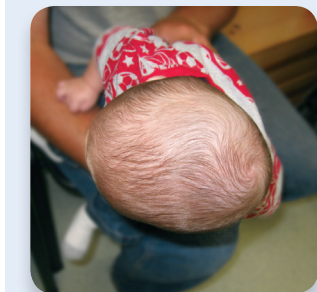
Brachycephaly

The infant's head is flat on the back part of the skull. This occurs if your baby spends a lot of time on their back.



Plagiocephaly

The infant's head is flat on one side. This occurs if the baby tends to keep their neck turned to one side.



1 Give your baby tummy time.

Babies should get a total of at least 30 minutes of supervised tummy time a day from the time they are sent home from the hospital unless otherwise instructed by your doctor. Your baby should be awake for tummy time.

Tummy time is important as it helps to strengthen the baby's neck and upper body.

It is common for babies to cry when they are on their tummy. Here is a list of tips to help your baby tolerate tummy time.

- Lie your baby on your chest
- Have lots of interesting things for your baby to look at when on their tummy
- Place a small roll under your baby's chest and prop their arms in front of the roll.

2 Alternate your baby's head position when they are sleeping.

The Canadian Pediatric Society recommends that infants sleep on their back at night time. To help prevent baby flathead simply try to alternate your baby's head position each time they go to sleep. Turn their neck to the left for one sleep and the next time turn the neck to the right.

If your baby wakes frequently throughout the night alternate their head position each time they go back to sleep.



3 Limit the amount of time that your baby spends in equipment.

Extended use of equipment such as car seats, swings, and bouncy chairs can contribute to flathead as the baby's head is resting on a hard surface. Limit the use of such equipment to when only necessary.

HOW CAN BABY FLATHEAD BE PREVENTED?



4 Ensure your baby can turn their neck fully in both directions.

It is common for young babies to prefer to look in one direction when they are lying on their backs. If you notice this with your baby, try to encourage them to look to the less preferred side by using brightly colored toys or your face. This will help to strengthen the muscles on that side.

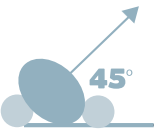
If your baby is unable to turn their neck to both sides you should discuss this with your doctor or community health nurse.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU NOTICE YOUR BABY'S HEAD ALREADY HAS A FLAT SPOT?

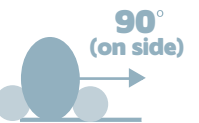
If your baby develops a flat spot, the shape of the baby's head can be changed by using specific repositioning techniques. Positioning is most effective when it is started early. The positioning takes the pressure off of the flat spot so your baby's head can round out as the head grows.

For babies with a flat spot on one side they should be positioned slightly off their back to the opposite side at about a 45 degree angle for all **supervised sleep***.

A roll can be used behind and in front of the baby to help keep them in that position.



For babies with a flat spot on the back of their heads babies should be positioned fully on their sides for **supervised sleep***. You should alternate the side they are on each time they sleep..



**Supervised sleep means anytime the baby is asleep and you are awake and monitoring your baby.*